

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2005-2006

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF
HUMAN SERVICES



Helping shape Tennessee lives.



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MISSION STATEMENT

To improve the well-being of economically disadvantaged, disabled, or vulnerable Tennesseans through a network of financial, employment, rehabilitative, and protective services.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Division of Adult and Family Services
15	Division of Child Support Services
16	Division of Rehabilitation Services
24	Division of Appeals and Hearings
26	Division of Finance and Administration
27	Office of the General Counsel
28	Office of the Inspector General

Families First

Families First has reached its 10th year of providing temporary cash assistance and an array of services to needy families in Tennessee. In June 2007, the waiver to the old AFDC program that created Families First will expire, at which time Tennessee must revise the Families First program to conform to new federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) regulations.

In the last year, TANF was reauthorized by Congress, and, as a result, states have a stricter definition of what is considered an “allowable work activity.” They also are required to track and to report actual hours of participation in these activities. States are still required to meet a minimum work participation rate of 50 percent; yet, how this rate must be calculated and any credits a state may earn toward this rate have been changed. States must meet the challenge of achieving these minimal rates or face federal penalties.

As Tennessee continues to plan the transition of the Families First program from a waiver to one that complies with the federal requirements, these recent changes must be considered while still achieving the desired outcomes for the clients DHS serves.

Accomplishments:

- The Work Participation Rate, the measure of the number of participants with a work plan who are active and making progress in their components, stands at 55.95 percent as of July 2006.
- Research currently being conducted by UT SWORPS indicates that for each work activity completed while enrolled in Families First, the probability of exiting the program and not returning increases by 37 percent. For those who complete a college degree or certificate while on the program, the odds of becoming a “leaver” increase by 400 percent.

Families First (continued)

- Individuals displaced by Hurricane Katrina who located temporarily in Tennessee were provided with special diversion payments designed to assist them with emergency needs. These diversion payments were one-time lump sum benefits, with a greatly simplified application and approval process to expedite assistance to these needy families who had often lost everything. Some 3,300 families took advantage of and qualified for these payments.
- In fiscal year 2006, several core Families First contractors opted to participate in a partial performance-based contract. These agencies permitted contractors to earn performance payments based on job placements and job retention for Families First clients who were served, while still receiving a percentage of their funding as cost reimbursement. A “pay for performance” model will become mandatory for all Families First core service contractors effective July 2007. It is extremely important in the Families First program that participants are allowed every opportunity to progress and achieve self-sufficiency. It is the Department’s belief that performance contracting will afford both the contractors and our Families First clients the best chance to excel.
- The Customer Service Review program, implemented in 1998, was terminated. This program provided a third-party review prior to termination of a Families First case, and it was implemented to address concerns regarding a client’s ability to reach his or her caseworker and resolve an issue that could lead to closure. With the implementation of the Department’s Family Assistance Service Centers, client access was no longer an issue. The Department has opted to replace this pre-closure review with a post-closure review, to be performed by State staff within the separate Division of Appeals and Hearings.
- The Child Care Star Quality Bonus Program continues to improve the quality of care for low-income children. As of July 2006, 68 percent of certificate enrollments are with providers receiving star bonuses – 49 percent are in 3 Star (the highest designation and a 4 percent increase from last year); 18 percent are in 2 Star; and 1 percent are in 1 Star.

Food Stamps

The Food Stamp Program helps ensure that eligible low-income families and individuals are able to obtain a nutritious diet. The program is the cornerstone of the federal food assistance programs, and it provides crucial support to needy households and to those making the transition from welfare to work. The goal of the program is to eliminate hunger and improve nutrition and health.

Accomplishments:

- Each day during state fiscal year 2005, the Food Stamp Program helped put food on the table for 386,000 Tennessee households containing 870,000 individuals. An average of \$81,000,000 was issued in Food Stamp benefits each month.
- In August 2005, the United States Department of Agriculture awarded Tennessee an \$800,000 grant to launch an 18-month pilot project in Davidson and Shelby counties to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program. A total of seven caseworkers in Shelby and Davidson counties, equipped with cell phones and laptop computers, make frequent home and community visits to clients to enroll and recertify them in the Food Stamp Program, thereby eliminating the need for clients to visit a county office. Since the project was implemented in April 2006, caseworkers have been enrolling and recertifying clients, with a special focus on four target populations: legal immigrants, working parents, pregnant women, and the elderly. The project is scheduled to continue through September 2007.
- Tennessee was one of the first states to respond to the needs of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. Within three days of the disaster, Tennessee successfully developed and implemented a plan to provide immediate emergency Food Stamp benefits to Katrina evacuees. By the time the emergency assistance period ended on October 31, 2005, Tennessee had provided emergency Food Stamp assistance to approximately 7,500 evacuee families. Many of these families have permanently relocated to Tennessee; and, thanks in part to the assistance provided through the Food Stamp Program, these families have made a successful transition to a new life in Tennessee.

Medicaid/TennCare

The Department of Finance and Administration's TennCare Bureau contracts with DHS to determine Medicaid and TennCare Standard eligibility. DHS determines eligibility in all of the possible categories of coverage and sends data to the TennCare Bureau via an electronic interface between the ACCENT and Interchange systems. This data will be used by TennCare to open Medicaid or TennCare Standard coverage when an individual has been approved and to terminate coverage when an individual is no longer eligible to receive Medicaid or TennCare Standard.

The DHS Medicaid/TennCare Policy Section ensures that Medicaid and TennCare Standard policies are accurate and conform to federal and state statutes. Policy staff respond to questions from local county offices, legislative staff, advocates, and constituents. This section makes provisions for the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) and Special Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary (SLMB) services. Staff ensures Medicare payments are paid in an accurate and timely manner by the state. In addition, they manage the QMB Hotline which disseminates QMB/SLMB application information and solves premium payment problems. It also makes decisions on incapacity status for Families First and AFDC-Medicaid-Only parents.

Accomplishments:

- Conducted the TennCare Standard disenrollment process affecting 191,512 enrollees.
- Offered an additional service to the citizens of Tennessee through the Medicare Part D Hot-Line. Callers to the Part D Hot-Line speak with a DHS representative who answers general questions pertaining to Part D eligibility and specific questions regarding the Medicare Part D Low-Income subsidy program. From October 2005 through January 2006 (the initial Part D enrollment period), the unit received an average of 125 calls per week.
- Released the on-line version of the TennCare Medicaid and TennCare Standard Policy Manual. This much-anticipated manual has proven to be a great asset to staff and is on the DHS intranet and internet web sites.

ACCENT and VIP System Coordination

The ACCENT system is the eligibility system for the Family Assistance programs. VIP (Vision Integration Platform) is the planned system to replace ACCENT and other legacy systems. Family Assistance Policy staff, in conjunction with DHS systems staff, are responsible for planning, testing, and implementing all changes to ACCENT to support changes in the Family Assistance programs as well as providing help desk support to all users of the system. Albion is the contractor working with state program and systems staff in the development of VIP. VIP will be a web-based, integrated framework application with an anticipated implementation date of July 2008.

Accomplishments:

- Developed reports to provide information about the Katrina and Rita hurricane victims receiving benefits through Family Assistance programs; manage and provide information related to the TennCare disenrollment process; implement a new procedure to evaluate continued Medicaid eligibility for those individuals whose Medicaid eligibility period is ending; and further support program management, as needed.
- Answered 29,393 helpline calls, averaging 2,449 calls per month, from ACCENT and ARTS (Appeals Report Tracking System) users.
- Developed logic in the ACCENT system to support the calculation and budgeting of the Qualified Income Trust (QIT/Miller Trust) policies in Medicaid institutionalized cases.
- Developed system support in ACCENT to manage the move from Customer Service Review to the Closure Review process in Families First.
- Relocated nine field staff from around the state to the VIP central office project to promote representation of district and county concerns and views with VIP development.
- Worked with Albion and DHS systems staff to achieve the VIP design kick-off and general design phases of the system.

Training Unit

The Family Assistance training unit is responsible for meeting the pre-service and in-service training needs of Family Assistance eligibility staff. Through a collaboration with state- and district-level staff, the unit develops training products needed to prepare eligibility staff with knowledge and skills to achieve program goals. Staff in this unit maintain the induction curriculum for new caseworkers, design training materials to accompany new policy releases, and develop new modules to address performance deficiencies. In the last 18 months, the role of the unit has greatly expanded to include:

- consultation and technical assistance.
- developing job aids.
- integrating technology into the workplace.
- staffing logistics and planning events.

The unit is now involved in work to enhance all aspects of training through the application of technology to existing and new training products.

Accomplishments:

- Established a process to maintain and revise the induction curriculum for Family Assistance.
- Using a customized induction curriculum, trained employees for their roles in the newly established Division of Appeals and Hearings.
- Delivered induction training for Davidson County.
- Developed and delivered Training for Trainers on the Security Administration Facility for Everyone (SAFE) to Family Assistance staff.
- Developed and maintained an on-line training library. This library houses training packets on Family Assistance policy, which can be accessed by staff for use as refresher training and other purposes.
- Develop training packets to accompany and support new policy releases (i.e., bulletins, memo, etc.).
- Developed and released on-line eligibility tools to assist front-line staff in completing their daily work (Family Assistance Standard Desk Guide, Food Stamp Calculator, and the Proration Web site).
- Supported and assisted the policy unit in delivering training for the transition of the Families First program.
- Delivered PACE and ECS training for Families First contractors statewide.

FAMILY ASSISTANCE SERVICE CENTERS

The Family Assistance Service Centers (FASC) help Food Stamp, Families First, and Medicaid/TennCare clients by providing them with a toll-free access number to obtain information about their cases, report changes, file appeals, etc. The Service Centers use a single toll-free number to distribute calls to approximately 260 staff who are located in Memphis, McKenzie, Clarksville, and Morristown. The Service Centers average approximately 25,000 inbound calls per week and support several other e-mail and outbound calling functions.

Accomplishments:

- Absorbed the out-of-state inquiries to county and central offices which added an additional 500 to 600 inquiries to the centers per month.
- Won the USDA Pinnacle Award for excellence through technology.
- Implemented a fourth Service Center to address the growth of call volume.
- Assumed management of the 2,500 monthly Child Support Non-Cooperation computer alerts to assist the county offices and ensure prompt case actions.

Adult Protective Services

APS provides assistance to vulnerable adults who are abused, neglected, or financially exploited and unable to protect themselves due to mental or physical impairments or advanced age.

Accomplishments:

- 7,723 new reports of adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation investigated.
- 9,865 vulnerable adults received APS services.
- 8,174 cases were closed. Of those that were valid, 84 percent were closed with risks reduced.

Child Care Licensing and Assessment

The Child Care program plans, implements, and coordinates activities and programs in the child-care system, which are focused on increasing child-care quality, accessibility, and availability.

Child Care Licensing is a regulatory function that ensures child-care centers and homes meet health, safety, and child development standards. Child Care Assessment staff conduct evaluations of child-care providers to determine quality and establish the Star Quality rating for facilities. Each year these evaluators complete assessments using the Environment Rating Scales for all 3,500 DHS licensed child-care facilities.

Accomplishments:

- Child-care quality in Tennessee has improved. The highest rating on the Evaluation and Report Card (three stars) has increased from 29.6 percent of all facilities at the end of the first year to 50.1 percent at the end of the fourth year. Overall, at the end of year four, 77 percent of all providers achieved at least one, two, or three stars.
- The Child Care Resource & Referral Network agencies are funded by DHS to provide training and technical assistance to providers. During fiscal year 2005-2006, 16,384 providers attended training and 10,638 providers received technical assistance in their child-care facilities.
- Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA) is funded by DHS to provide child care orientations and subsidies to promote higher educational attainment by providers. In the past year, 2,024 child-care providers completed a free 30-hour orientation. Child development associate's degree classes were completed by 1,655 providers.
- The Licensing unit monitored 3,569 licensed child-care agencies and conducted 20,619 unannounced on-site inspections.
- 2,166 complaints against agencies were received. 97percent of these complaints were investigated and resolved within 30 days of the Department receiving the complaint.
- 1,015 criminal background checks on applicants to work in child care or adult day care resulted in individuals being identified as subject to exclusion from employment. Of these cases, 798 individuals were excluded from child care or adult day care. 122 of these individuals were excluded from driving for a child care agency.

The Tennessee Child Care Facilities Corporation (TCCFC)

The Tennessee Child Care Facilities Corporation was established to meet the financial needs of Tennessee's child-care industry. The Corporation is a quasi-state, non-profit financial agency designed to assist in the enhancement, expansion, and creation of child-care facilities through loan guarantee, direct loan, and/or corporate partnership grant programs.

In addition, the Corporation:

- Conducts training seminars and workshops in the areas of small business management and organizational development.
- Conducts and co-sponsors conferences for directors and administrators that are dedicated to enhancing the management skills, professionalism, and leadership capacity of early childhood professionals.
- Provides technical assistance to individuals starting and/or expanding child-care facilities.
- Assists with financial counseling and packaging of loan proposals.
- Publishes *Child Care & Business Exchange* newsletter to provide business management articles, tips, and strategies to child-care providers, individuals, professionals, and businesses for the purpose of sharing information about child-care development, management, new initiatives, and potential funding sources.
- Assists companies and communities in developing child-care partnership programs designed to assist employers in addressing the child-care needs of their employees.

Accomplishments:

- 1,903 potential owners and operators were provided small business orientation training.
- 592 directors and administrators statewide were provided small business management training to improve managerial skills and business practices.

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)

The Community Services Block Grant program assists low-income individuals and families with emergency services, job development, adult education, and other self-sufficiency programs.

Accomplishments:

- Directed \$12 million in federal grant funds through 20 participating agencies reaching all 95 counties.
- 188,357 low-income eligible Tennesseans received services.

Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG)

The Emergency Shelter Grant Program provides funding to local governments and private, non-profit service providers to assist homeless people in Tennessee.

Accomplishments:

- \$1.3 million were made available in Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding to local non-profit groups and units of local government across the state.
- 37,537 homeless persons received emergency shelter and other support services statewide.
- \$100,000 in federal funds were provided for transitional housing for persons with mental illness to maintain independent living.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program assists low-income households in meeting their home energy needs. Benefits include assistance for heating and cooling costs.

Accomplishments:

- Provided home energy utility bill assistance to 73,331 low-income eligible Tennesseans.
- During a year of unusual increases in home energy costs, the Department, through its statewide network of 19 Community Action and Human Resource Agencies, successfully managed more than \$28 million in LIHEAP funds.

Refugee Social Services (RSS)

The Refugee Social Services program provides grant funds to non-profit agencies and local governments to assist political refugees being resettled in Tennessee so they can achieve self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.

Accomplishments:

- More than \$590,000 in federal funds were made available to three agencies statewide.
- 2,824 refugees received services during this period.

Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)

SSBG Adult Services target current and former Adult Protective Service clients to prevent further abuse, neglect, or exploitation, while allowing participating individuals to maintain the highest level of independence possible.

Accomplishments:

- Funded 15 agencies statewide to provide 4,176 low-income and disabled Tennesseans with Adult Day Care and Homemaker services.
- \$4 million in Federal funds were used to leverage an additional \$1 million in local funds.

Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)

The Weatherization Assistance Program assists low-income households with weatherizing their homes to decrease their energy bills. Benefits include the installation of insulation and other energy saving procedures.

Accomplishments:

- More than \$6 million in federal funds were used by 19 agencies statewide to reduce the long-term home energy costs for vulnerable elderly and low-income individuals and families.
- 1,865 homes of low-income Tennesseans were weatherized during this period, which represents 3,858 adults and children who benefited from this service.

Child & Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

The CACFP provides reimbursements for the costs of serving nutritious meals to participants who meet age, income, and other program requirements. The reimbursements are available for eligible child-care centers and homes, adult-care centers, homeless shelters and after-school programs for at-risk children.

Accomplishments:

- Reimbursements were provided for 36,471,742 meals served to a daily average of 72,809 participants at more than 3,000 feeding sites.

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

The SFSP provides reimbursements for the costs of serving nutritious meals to children during the summer vacation period. The reimbursements are available for eligible private non-profit organizations, local governments, and colleges and universities.

Accomplishments:

- Reimbursements were provided for 1,710,609 meals served to a daily average of 27,202 participants at 875 feeding sites.

Tennessee's Child Support program is administered by DHS through contracts with 19 district attorneys, one juvenile court, 10 private contractors and one DHS-run program. This division's services include:

- Locating non-custodial parents.
- Establishing paternity.
- Establishing and enforcing financial and medical support orders.
- Reviewing and adjusting support orders.
- Collecting and distributing child-support payments.

Accomplishments:

- Total child-support collections reached an all-time high of \$524,769,776 for state fiscal year 2006. That represents an average daily collection of more than \$1.4 million.
- Treasury Offset collections increased to \$38,463,818.
- License Revocation collections totaled \$11,000,735; 6,918 licenses were revoked.
- Unemployment Compensation Offset collections totaled \$3,672,104.
- The child support collection rate for current support increased to 56.72 percent from 56.62 percent the previous fiscal year.
- To help simplify and expedite the disbursement of child support, DHS now offers direct deposit of child-support payments. A debit card program was designed to offer an alternative payment method, with implementation planned for state fiscal year 2007.
- To expedite payment and collection of child support, DHS now accepts payments on-line.
- A Child Support Income Shares Tutorial internet web site is maintained for public use that includes an automated web-style child support order calculator, Excel child support and credit worksheets, Income Shares Guidelines, Child Support Schedule, and other detailed information. Go to www.state.tn.us/humanserv/is/incomeshares.htm to see the web site designed jointly by DHS Systems, Child Support, and General Counsel staff.

The major objectives of this division are to assist Tennesseans with disabilities to prepare for and gain employment in order to live as independently as possible. In addition, the Division strives to issue timely and accurate decisions on applications for Social Security Income (SSI) benefits, to implement assistive-technology use in living and working, and to deliver services for the deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf/blind.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Accomplishments:

- Served 41,902 individuals with disabilities in fiscal year 2005. 3,382 achieved successful outcomes (rehabilitated).
- Of the 3,382 successful outcomes, 2,974 (87.94 percent) were individuals with significant disabilities.
- Increased annualized earnings of the 3,382 individuals rehabilitated by \$48,787,284.
 - Before rehabilitation \$5,593,016
 - After rehabilitation \$54,380,300
- Achieved a 96.2 percent satisfaction rating for successful outcome closures and achieved an 88.0 percent satisfaction rating for unsuccessful outcome closures as reported by Consumer Satisfaction Survey program conducted by the University of Memphis.
- Passed Standards and Indicators pursuant to Section 106 of the Disability Act.
- Enhanced partnerships with each of the Workforce Development Career Centers through the co-location of a VR counselor at each center.

Rehabilitation Facilities

Accomplishments of Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) at Smyrna:

- Provided programs of rehabilitation services to 1,579 clients on campus as well as off campus mobile services.
- Developed and implemented a new occupational skills training program titled "Hospitality Worker."
- Established a new partnership and letter of agreement with the town of Smyrna, Parks and Recreation Department, to open the campus outdoor sports field to the community softball and soccer leagues with the professional grooming and upkeep of the ball and soccer fields to be managed by Parks and Recreation.
- Completed a \$290,000 capital maintenance project that included installation of a new roof on the Gymnasium and canopy walkway.
- Obtained approval and \$500,000 state funding for two capital maintenance projects to upgrade exterior lighting on campus and upgrade installation of a new elevator and connector glass between buildings A and B.
- Established a new partnership and letter of agreement with the Middle Tennessee Motor Cycle Training Safety Program, provided in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Safety, to promote motorcycle operator safety training and helmet use utilizing the on-campus driving range. Motorcycle operator safety training and helmet use reduces the incidents of serious injuries (i.e., spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries).
- Established new alliances with the Sam Schmidt Paralysis Foundation and the Easter Seals Adaptive Water Skiing Clinic for persons with spinal cord injuries to provide students with severe mobility impairments opportunities to experience recreational activities of water skiing and motorcar racing.
- Established an alliance with Vanderbilt Stalworth Rehabilitation Hospital for clients with spinal cord injuries to attend Spinal Cord Injury Support Group at Stalworth. Alliance with Vanderbilt Stalworth Rehabilitation Hospital has resulted in a 50 percent increase in the admissions of clients with spinal cord injuries to the TRC Physical Rehabilitation Services Program.
- TRC psychology services staff provided in-service training for Adult Protective Services staff on "Disability Education and Psychopathology" and provided in-service training to staff at the Columbia TRC in "Anger Management."
- Presented at the Tennessee MEGA Conference on Disabilities. Psychology staff presented "Alcohol and Drug Issues for People with Disabilities" and "Teaching Anger Management Skills to People with Disabilities." Vision impairment service staff presented "Adaptive Products and Techniques for Individuals who are Blind or Have Significant Visual Impairments."

Accomplishments of Community TRCs:

- All 17 Community TRCs have been incorporated into the vocational rehabilitation field office structure to better coordinate vocational rehabilitation service delivery. The community TRCs are headed by two directors of field operations, who report to the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Reorganization of the Division has resulted in the implementation of the “one boss” structure at the Shelbyville, Cleveland, Maryville, Cookeville, and Manchester centers.
- 2,572 Vocational evaluations were completed by the community TRCs.
- Of the 19 Vocational Evaluators, nine achieved at least 100 percent of goal, which means completing 144 written evaluations.
- 594 clients completed employee development training which made them better prepared to obtain and maintain successful employment.
- 487 clients obtained competitive employment with average weekly earnings of \$310.36.
- Nine TRCs achieved 100 percent of goal for program areas of evaluation, employee development, and job placement.
- Twelve TRCs achieved at or above 90 percent of goal for the three program areas.
- TRC contract income exceeded \$1.57 million, and payroll to clients exceeded \$964,069.
- VR has committed to a new building in Cookeville. Building expansion of 6,000 square feet is under construction at the Sumner County TRC.
- Greenville TRC was honored as “The Center of the Year” by the TRC State Advisory Board.
- TRC at Camden was honored as “The Most Improved Center of the Year” by the TRC State Advisory Board.
- TRC accounting technicians have received certification in Quik Books payroll software and are providing training to all 17 TRCs.
- Middle Tennessee TRCs (Murfreesboro, Manchester, Gallatin, Winchester, Columbia, Shelbyville, and Franklin) received a three-year accreditation from CARF. This is the first year for these centers to be certified as a group and the first year for these centers to receive certification in all three program areas without recommendations for improvement.

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

This unit provides specialized services to Tennessee citizens who are blind or severely visually impaired. Services are provided on an individualized basis and are intended to assist persons who are blind or visually impaired to compete in the workforce and/or to live independently in their homes and communities. Specific program areas include Vocational Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Teaching, Independent Living Services for Older Blind Individuals, and Tennessee Business Enterprises, which is also known as the Vending Facility Program. Additionally, the agency funds Newline for Blind Services, which allows individuals who are blind to access more than 50 newspapers via standard touch-tone telephones.

Accomplishments:

- The VR Program successfully rehabilitated and placed into employment 210 individuals.
- The Rehabilitation Teachers served 1,200 individuals, enabling them to live more independently in their homes and communities.
- The overall customer satisfaction rating for the Rehabilitation Teaching and Older Blind programs was 99 percent, with 96 percent of those individuals served reporting they were more independent as a result of services received.
- Four new Rehabilitation Teacher positions were established to serve an increasing number of older individuals who are blind.
- The Tennessee Business Enterprises Program (TBE) opened three new vending facilities which were assigned to licensed blind vendors.
- TBE blind vendors generated more than \$20 million in annual sales, with the average income per blind vendor increasing by approximately 5 percent to more than \$45,300.
- TBE brought the program to collect unassigned vending machine revenues from state, county, and municipal properties in-house.
- The number of Newline users increased by 12 percent to 1,186 individuals.
- A grant was awarded to Prevent Blindness of Tennessee to expand screening services of older blind individuals who might have severe visual impairments. The grant also funded a statewide seminar on aging and blindness.

Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

This unit was established January 1, 2005 to enhance VR services to persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Twelve specialty caseloads were established to assist Tennesseans who are deaf or hard of hearing gain and retain successful competitive employment. A primary focus of the unit is to refine the skills of VR counselors.

Accomplishments:

- One new VR Counselor position was designated to serve individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Chattanooga to meet the demands in that area.
- The new unit placed into employment 124 individuals who were deaf or hard of hearing.

TN Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TCDHH)

The council promotes the rights and interests of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf/Blind persons. In addition, the council coordinates service efforts for this population.

Accomplishments:

- Provided a total of \$170,000 to each of the six Community Centers for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing across the state for support services to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf/Blind DRS clients and applicants. Services included: interpreting, information, referral, peer counseling, and helping clients access community services.
- Community Centers for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing across Tennessee have produced these results:
 - 13,291 Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf/Blind individuals received services;
 - 778 outreach and referrals to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf/Blind individuals to Vocational Rehabilitation;
 - 12,177 hours of Sign Language Interpreting for Vocational Rehabilitation;
 - Technical assistance was provided to employers 899 times.
- TCDHH's Ad Hoc Educational Interpreter Committee is supporting current educational interpreter assessment evaluations and seeks to evaluate more educational interpreters each year.

TN Technology Access Project (TTAP)

TTAP provides funding to five Tennessee regional assistive technology centers. The centers – located in Jackson, Knoxville, Chattanooga, Memphis, and Nashville – provide training, evaluation, public awareness, and advocacy services. In addition to these vital services, the centers each operate the TTAP device demonstration, device loan, and device reutilization programs. These three core programs are designed to increase the availability and ultimately the acquisition of assistive technology devices, so individuals who happen to experience a disability have the tools they need to live an independent, productive life where and how they choose.

Accomplishments:

- TTAP created the Statewide Advisory Council (SAC). The 17 member advisory council is comprised of assistive technology users and other stakeholders from across Tennessee. The SAC's mission is to advise TTAP staff about constituent needs and assist staff in evaluating TTAP's programs for effectiveness as well as identify and make recommendations for future activities.
- TTAP, the SAC, and the technology centers created the TTAP device loan program. The program is designed to provide individuals who have disabilities temporary access to assistive technology. The long- or short-term loans are designed to increase the access to assistive technology so that people with disabilities have opportunities to see whether specific devices will meet their needs before making purchasing decisions or as short-term replacement devices while their devices are being ordered or repaired.
- TTAP, the SAC and technology centers created a more long-term solution for accessing older technology through the creation of the TTAP Reutilization Program. The TTAP Device Reutilization Program gives new life to older, yet functional, technology by matching that technology with the needs of individuals who have disabilities who might not otherwise have the resources to purchase new technology. These devices are safe and in working condition and are provided at little or no charge to the individual or family member.

DRS Quality Improvement

The Quality Improvement Unit was formed in the summer of 2006 with the goal of supporting and driving the vision and mission of Rehabilitation Services through continuous internal process improvement, contract management, quality control, timely and accurate federal reporting, and U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration compliance. The essence of the Quality Improvement Unit is to move away from a critical compliance orientation to a client-oriented success orientation.

Projects underway:

- A fact-based analysis and client-oriented solution to improving vocational rehabilitation's 60-day eligibility determination percentages.
- Implementation of result-oriented letters of understanding with our vendor partners.

Disability Determination Services

Disability Determination Services (DDS) makes disability determination decisions on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claims and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) claims. DDS is 100 percent federally funded by the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Accomplishments:

- Processed a record 114,423 disability claims, including 13,906 continuing disability reviews.
- Achieved full implementation of the electronic disability folder process by all claims examiners, becoming fully certified by the SSA in September 2005.
- Chosen to participate in a National Social Security Administration pilot project to test the viability of a national medical expert unit in conjunction with The Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities in Memphis.
- Became a national and regional leader in the recruitment of medical evidence of record providers to participate in the electronic provision of these records to the agency.
- Continued activities on statewide Cooperative Disability Committee, which includes representatives from each component of the SSA disability program. This group meets quarterly to address issues that can improve the determination process across multiple components. Once improvements are identified, they are then communicated across the state via a newsletter. DDS expanded this process improvement to national level via an annual meeting.
- Processed 1,211 allowance claims for terminally ill claimants, with an average processing time of 29 days.

TN Committee for Employment of People with Disabilities (TCEPD):

This state committee promotes the creation of an equal employment climate for Tennesseans with disabilities. TCEPD provides technical assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to Division of Rehabilitation Services clients and assistance to other businesses and organizations involved in employment of and promotional activities for individuals with disabilities.

Accomplishments:

- **Technical Assistance/Information and Referral Services:** More than 80 ADA training presentations were conducted for businesses, local and state government officials, and non-profit organizations. Provided technical assistance/information and referral services to the general public, DRS clients, and job applicants.
- **Special Projects:** TCEPD worked on several projects in cooperation with other entities, such as co-sponsoring, planning and participating in the Scholastic/Athletic/Citizenship Recognition for area high school seniors, Disability Mentoring Day partnering students with disabilities and area businesses, and the Tennessee Disability Mega Conference.
- **Office on Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and Workforce Employer Outreach Committees (WEOC):** During the year, TCEPD partnered with the ODEP and WEOCs across the state on a variety of projects, including the National Disability Employment Awareness Month for October, Disability Mentoring Day, and a National Training Conference in Los Angeles, California.

The Division of Appeals and Hearings receives appeals and conducts fair hearings for applicants and clients who did not receive the services and/or benefits from the Department to which they believe they were entitled. The Division conducts administrative disqualification hearings at the request of the Department. The Appeals and Hearings Division handles appeals for all programs administered by the Department, as well as appeals for the Bureau of TennCare relating to eligibility. Our goal is to resolve appeals in a timely manner while ensuring due process and maintaining the highest quality of communication possible. The Division is composed of the following units:

- Intake, Conciliation and Implementation Unit processes new appeals for all programs, conducts fair hearable and timely determinations for new appeals, attempts to resolve Family Assistance appeals before they are set for hearing through the use of conciliation specialists and informal resolution, and implements Family Assistance fair hearing decisions.
- Case Preparation Unit schedules due process hearings, prepares Notices of Hearing for all cases, represents the Department at all Family Assistance hearings and upon judicial review, and records and compiles the official hearing record for the Division.
- Hearing Officer Unit conducts due process hearings for all programs across the State and enters Initial Orders for all such hearings.
- Commissioner Designee's Attorney Unit prepares legal opinions for Division staff, enters all Final Orders, as applicable, reviews agreed orders of withdrawal, responds to "good cause" requests, and prepares draft responses to petitions for appeal of the Initial Order and for reconsideration of the Final Order.
- Closure Review Unit reviews selected Families First cases after closure, but within the 10-day adverse action period. In addition, the Unit maintains the tracking of data from referrals of those closed Families First cases to the Department of Health.

Accomplishments:

- Customer Service Review (CSR), the third-party “pre-case closure” review of selected Families First cases, was eliminated effective July 1, 2006. However, the Department recognized the importance of ensuring that Families First participants do not have their cases closed in error. To that end, a new “Closure Review Team” was created within the Division of Appeals and Hearings. This team of DHS staff now reviews cases after closure, but within the 10-day adverse action period. In addition, this Unit will maintain the tracking of data from referrals of those closed Families First cases to the Health Department.

There was much preparation for these new responsibilities within the Division, including the hiring and training of new staff. In addition, a web-based tracking system was designed to record the review and referral process involved in the closure of these Families First cases.

- The Division successfully processed more than 70,000 appeals related to TennCare disenrollment. This involved the hiring and training of temporary staff in all areas of the Division, as well as expanding hearing locations and server capacity for the Appeals Resolution and Tracking System (ARTS).
- The Division prepared to assume responsibility for hearing all appeals, including all Family Assistance appeals, as of July 1, 2006. Previously, many Family Assistance fair hearings were conducted by the Secretary of State, Administrative Procedures Division. In preparation for this process, numerous enhancements were made to ARTS to accommodate this change in hearing procedure. In addition, the Division streamlined the hearing process, training staff on additional types of appeals so that all appeals go through the Case Preparation Unit for scheduling and preparation of notices.

The Division of Finance and Administration prepares the annual departmental budget submission; processes contractor/vendor payments; prepares federal expenditure reports; provides contract technical assistance; performs ongoing fiscal analysis; and monitors federal programs for cash management. The Department's budget was \$1.9 billion.

The Information System Division supports the Department's strategic plan with a technology strategy that provides for the basic infrastructure and technical support to meet operational needs; includes partnering with senior management to develop and implement projects and/or initiatives to support the mission and program requirements of the agency; and facilitates coordination and collaboration with the Office of Information Resources (OIR), other state agencies, and federal business partners.

During the past fiscal year, the Division contributed to many technological achievements in the Department. The most notable are listed below.

Accomplishments:

- Completed the evaluation phase of the Vision Integration Platform (VIP) Request for Proposal (RFP) and awarded the contract to Albion, Inc. Completed first project milestone, Design Kick-off Phase. Project is currently in the Detail Design phase.
- Supported emergency disaster relief assistance to Hurricane Katrina evacuees. Issued approximately 7,346 emergency food stamp Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, assisting approximately 3,387 Families First recipients and approximately 3,000 Medicaid recipients.
- Provided systems setup and support for the Katrina Relief Center in Memphis.
- Completed major systems modifications to the Automated Client Certification Eligibility Network for Tennessee (ACCENT) system in support of the TennCare disenrollment initiative.
- Completed major redesign of the Appeals Resolution Tracking System (ARTS) to accommodate business process re-engineering and adding major functionality.
- Designed, tested, and implemented several management databases to support the TennCare disenrollment initiative.
- Added debit card functionality to the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement System (TCSES). Custodial parents now have the option to receive child support payments via a debit card in addition to direct deposit, or by check for some parents.
- Completed major income shares modification to the TCSES application. In addition, two distributed Income Shares Applications--the Excel Spreadsheet and the Automated Calculator--were also modified to meet the new Income Shares guidelines.

The Office of General Counsel --- through its State Office legal staff, Appeals and Hearings litigation staff, and District legal staff located in Nashville, Memphis, Knoxville, and Dandridge --- provides legal advice to all DHS programs and provides legal representation in judicial and administrative litigation affecting all Department programs. It also prepares Departmental rules affecting program implementation, conducts analyses of legislation affecting the Department, prepares legislation for the Department, and represents the Department before the Tennessee General Assembly. The Office provides compliance oversight and training involving Titles VI and IX, HIPAA, and Motor Voter registration. The office processes civil rights, EEOC, and Human Rights Commission complaints involving program services and Department employees. Attorneys with the Office also review and litigate Department personnel actions. The Office provides ongoing legal training for legal and program staff in the Child Support and other programs. Additionally, the Office provides assistance to the State Attorney General's Office for federal and appellate litigation involving the Department's programs.

Accomplishments:

- The Office of General Counsel, in cooperation with the Child Support program staff, enacted modified regulations governing the Child Support program's Income Shares Guidelines to successfully implement several changes suggested by the Income Shares Advisory Committee appointed by the Commissioner. The Office also conducted training to educate staff, courts, and attorneys regarding the changes.
- The Litigation Unit of the Office had more than 715 active cases in fiscal year 2006, provided nearly 7,500 hours of client litigation and program advice services and obtained judgments of \$288,735 involving overpayments in Department programs.
- The legal assistance provided by the Department's Child Support attorneys in the 4th Judicial District was part of the team effort leading to total collections of \$10.7 million for fiscal year 2006 — an 11.58 percent increase in child support collections in that District over fiscal 2005.
- Attorneys in the Department's Case Preparation Unit of the Appeals and Hearings Division processed approximately 21,900 Family Assistance administrative appeals during fiscal year 2006.

The Office of Inspector General includes oversight of Program Assessment, Internal Audit, and Investigations. By combining these sections in an independent office, DHS is ensuring greater integrity and accountability within the Department. This office conducts compliance and quality control reviews of DHS programs; investigates referrals of (possible) fraud and abuse in the programs; handles adjudication and process collections of claims overpayment; and conducts internal audits and investigations for the Department.

The Program Review section of the Office of the Inspector General is charged with monitoring the performance of certain agencies that contract with DHS to provide services for clients. The purpose of the monitoring process is to ensure required services are being provided to our clients and to evaluate the performance of the contracting agency in accordance with the terms of the contract. The information generated in the office assists DHS in providing services to clients through contracting agencies more effectively and efficiently.

The Quality Control section is responsible for conducting reviews of a valid statistical sample of Food Stamp recipients as required by federal quality control standards. These reviews consist of detailed examinations of a household's eligibility and financial circumstances. The office then determines whether benefits were authorized accurately and thus payments are made properly. In addition, the Quality Control office is responsible for operating the State's Management Evaluation Plan, reviewing a sample of Medicaid cases pulled from the Adult and Families Categories, and reviewing a sample of Families First cases. DHS Quality Control data allows the State to remain aware of its accuracy level, allows for the identification of trends, and allows for preparation of appropriate corrective actions. Quality Control operates on the federal fiscal year (October through September).